



Los Angeles County
Department of Regional Planning

Planning for the Challenges Ahead



Jon Sanabria
Acting Director of Planning

September 08, 2009

TO: Supervisor Don Knabe, Chairman
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: Jon Sanabria
Acting Director of Planning

**SUBJECT: QUARTERLY STATUS REPORT ON BOARD MOTION REGARDING
RURAL ISSUES AND THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE
(December 9, 2008, Item 39-B)**

On December 9, 2008 your Board instructed the Director of Planning to take the following actions:

1. Formulate draft standards for development of rural communities within the General Plan Update;
2. Identify provisions that relate to development of rural communities in future outreach efforts concerning the General Plan Update;
3. Make a presentation to the Association of Rural Town Councils no later than April of 2009 concerning rural issues and the General Plan Update; and,
4. Report back to the Board of Supervisors every 90 days identifying how the Department is addressing rural issues in the General Plan Update.

This is the third quarterly status report as directed by your Board motion and it summarizes the progress the Department of Regional Planning (Department) has made in addressing the actions outlined above.

The Department and rural residents have developed a very good working relationship regarding rural issues the General Plan Update. Department staff tours of rural communities facilitated by the Association of Rural Town Councils have greatly informed the continuing development of the Draft General Plan. Since February 18, 2009 tours of 13 rural communities have been conducted and three presentations by Department staff to the Association of Rural Town Councils have been made.

As the Draft General Plan is further developed attention to rural issues will remain crucial because the Plan establishes the countywide framework for the protection of rural communities and supports the further clarification of rural protection in local plans such as the update of the Antelope Valley Area Plan. This attention acknowledges the County's recognition of rural areas as valuable assets and is reflected in the rural-specific land use goal in the Land Use Element of the Draft General Plan:

- Goal LU-6 – Preservation and enhancement of rural areas and rural communities.

The uniqueness and value of the diverse rural communities in Los Angeles County are further acknowledged in the following sections of the Draft General Plan:

- The Foreword describes the Antelope Valley as “a series of small communities that cherish their status as the last places in Los Angeles County where one can live the rural life”, and specifically calls out Acton as a representation of County rural life, where “low density development is the norm” and whose identity is defined by enforcing rural standards.
- The Introduction Chapter outlines the top issues that County residents feel are important topics to be addressed in the General Plan. One of the top priorities in this section is to “Protect Rural Communities and Rural Lifestyles”, and to maintain the unique character and development patterns of unincorporated rural communities.
- The Background Chapter provides a summary of the defining characteristics of each region of the unincorporated County. For northern Los Angeles County, the Antelope Valley region is described as an area where residents “value the rural nature of their communities”.

Rural residents are concerned about the effects the Draft General Plan may have on the character and lifestyles of their communities when it is adopted. Particularly, rural residents view rural land use as dispersed, spread out with appropriate activities to support a small number of inhabitants. Viewed this way, rural residents believe that rural areas could be seen as buffers to urban development, keeping it directed toward established urban areas with appropriate infrastructure.

As the Department works to shape the Draft General Plan to account for recent State laws that require general plans to address climate change and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, close attention is being paid to the strategies rural residents feel can help. The Draft General Plan is being carefully prepared to ensure that the County's land use policies are employed strategically to direct the majority of future growth away from rural areas and into suburban and urban areas with greater access to infrastructure, mass transit, and regional commercial centers.

The Draft General Plan publicly released in summer 2008 is now being comprehensively revised. What the Department has learned from its collaboration with the Association of Rural Town Councils and its outreach to rural residents will be incorporated into the revised Draft General Plan. This is very important, because when adopted, the General Plan will serve as the foundation countywide policy document that guides long range development. It will address multiple and complex issues such as land use, mobility, preservation of open space, water availability, natural resource protection, hazards, infrastructure adequacy, housing, climate change, and livability that all residents face. Therefore, keeping rural issues at the forefront in the development this complex policy document will ensure that the uniqueness and role of rural communities in Los Angeles County is not overlooked.

Staff will continue to reach out to rural residents and work with the dedicated and informed representatives of the Association of Rural Town Councils as the General Plan Update continues. As instructed by your Board, future outreach efforts will clarify the unique role that rural communities have in the Draft General Plan. The next quarterly report on rural issues and the General Plan Update will be delivered on December 8, 2009.

Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact me or Mark Herwick of my staff at (213) 974-6423 or by email at mherwick@planning.lacounty.gov. Our office hours are 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Thursday. We are closed on Fridays.

JS:RCH:MSH

c: Chief Executive Officer, Attn: Lari Sheehan
Acting County Counsel
Executive Office, Board of Supervisors
Wayne Argo, President, Association of Rural Town Councils